

NIGERIAN EDUCATION IN FOCUS

ISSUE NO 4



RECENT HAPPENINGS

Kano Begins Free Compulsory Secondary Education

Kano State Government is set to pass a legislation to make basic and secondary education compulsory in the state. The intervention will also include the almajiri, to address the millions of out-of-school children in the state. This will cover the provision of school fees, instructional materials and infrastructure. [Read more](#)

Former Education Minister, Bemoan Poor Teacher Quality

Former Minister of Education, Professor Ruqayyah Rufai has expressed concerns over the number of unqualified teachers in the country. She also lamented that people from other professions join the teaching profession because they are unable to secure jobs. [Read more](#)

JAMB Suspends 40 percent of CBTCs in Nasarawa

The Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) has suspended 13 out of the 32 Computer Based Test Centres (CBTCs) in Nasarawa State due to infractions or failure to meet set standards. [Read more](#)

FG Working to Boost Basic Education, SDGs

The Minister of State for Education, Chukwuemeka Nwajiuba, has emphasized that the Federal Government is committed to achieving basic education, life-long learning and other components of the Sustainable Development Goals before the 2030 deadline. [Read more](#)

DATA SPEAKS

EARLY CHILD EDUCATION: THE MOST IMPORTANT; YET THE MOST NEGLECTED

Education is acknowledged largely as a significant tool because it equips students with the functional skills for decent living and generates human capital that can spur economic development. Education has many levels, each of which is essential in its distinctiveness and therefore requires adequate public investment. In Nigeria, government's policy design and investment focuses mainly on three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary education. In fact, it is not far-fetched to assume that most Nigerians think these are the only levels of education. Government policy, in part, feeds into this narrative with the division of the education system into structures like 6-5-2-3 or more recently 6-3-3-4, in which only primary, secondary and tertiary education are emphasized.

However, there is a fourth level of education—the Early Childhood Education (ECE) which starts from birth through the pre-school, until the child enters the primary level of education. ECE was officially recognized in Nigeria in the 2013 National Policy on Education, with the introduction of 1-6-3-3-4 system. The additional one year covers ECE and was designed to be free and compulsory, thereby extending basic education from 9 to 10 years. According to National Policy of Education (2013), the goal of the ECE is to facilitate transition from home to school and prepare children for primary level of education.

This belated recognition of ECE has not raised its status in any significant way. As shown in Figure 1a, among the pupils enrolled in Primary 1 to Junior Secondary School in 2015, only 45% have attended pre-school. It is also telling that the pattern of pre-school attendance reflects the typical dimension of exclusion in education in Nigeria. Specifically, about 75% of those that have not attended pre-school are from rural areas, while non-attendance is highest among children from the poorest households (Figure 1b). Overall, this data suggests that the majority of children transit directly from home into primary school. While home and family education is an important component of ECE, attending pre-school could ensure seamless transition to primary education.

Figure 1a: Attendance of ECE in Nigeria

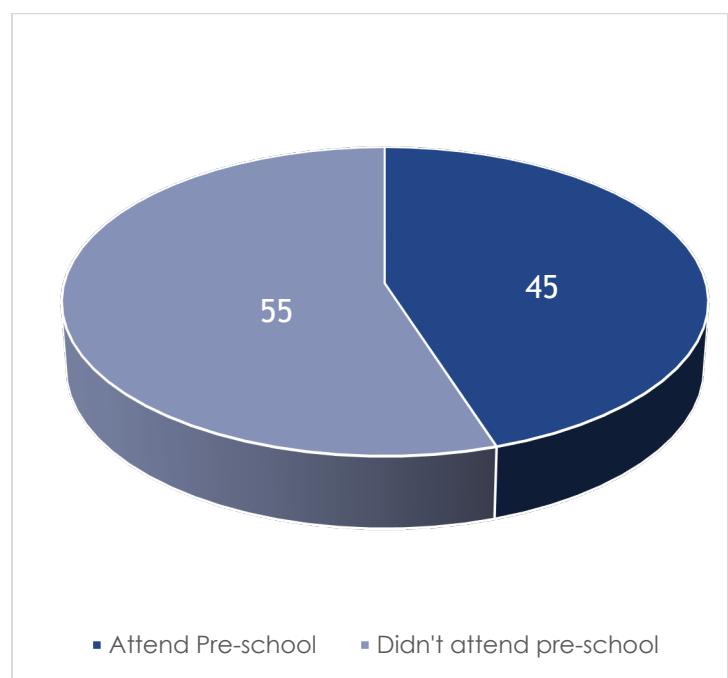


Figure 1b: Characteristics of Children not Attending Pre-school

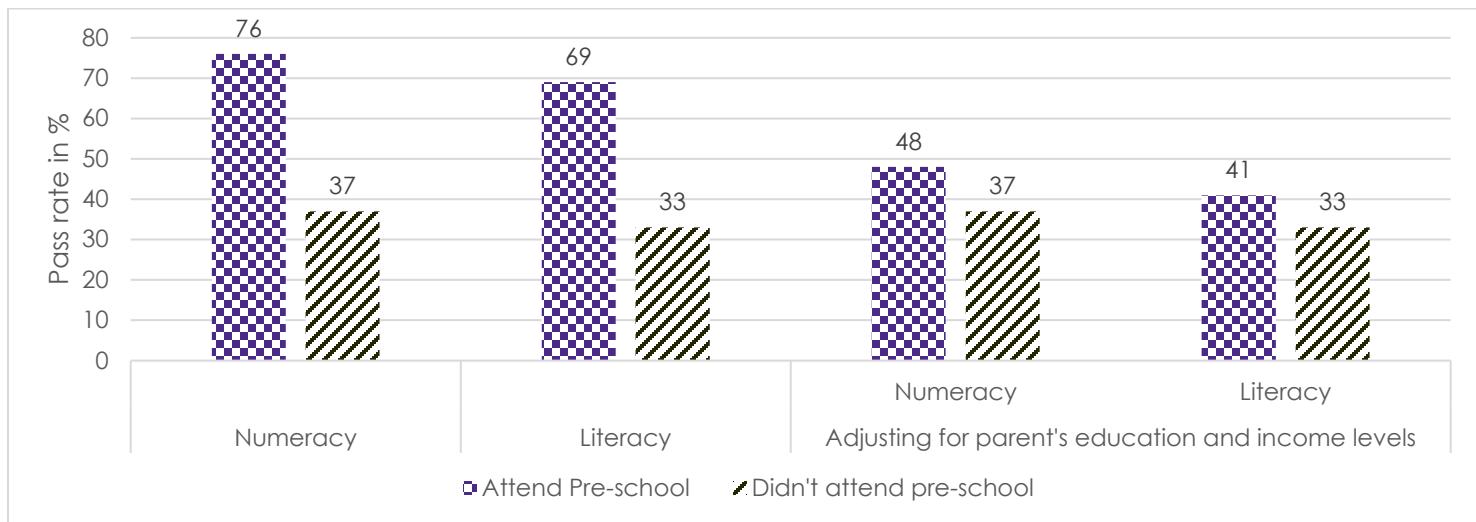


Government neglect of ECE is evident due to a lack of specialized regulatory institution for it compared to other levels of education. The running and operation of pre-school centers is entirely situated with private sector and social development centers, with some level of oversight from the state ministries of education. Despite the National Policy on Education (2013) incorporating the ECE into the basic education framework, the scheme has not been implemented in any state in the country. In fact, while funding for all levels of education is poor in Nigeria, ECE has no funding commitment from any arms of government, except modest allocation that could be used for ECE as part of primary education budget. The implication of government's neglect is that ECE becomes accessible mostly to middle- and high-income earners (Figure 1b), thereby excluding children from poor households.

Figure 2 compares the performance of Primary 1 to JSS students based on attendance of preschool. Performance is defined by the ability to meet minimum competency in numeracy and literacy such as the ability to read and comprehend and do simple arithmetic. By this estimate, 76% of students that attend pre-school meet the minimum benchmark in numeracy, compared to 37% for those that did not attend. Similarly, 69% of those that attend pre-school are estimated competent in literacy, compared to 33% for those that did not. The difference in performance could come from other factors like parents' education and income; 11% points and 8% points difference in numeracy and literacy performance based on attendance of pre-school. Hence, it can be deduced that part of the learning crisis observed in Nigeria is due to the neglect of ECE.



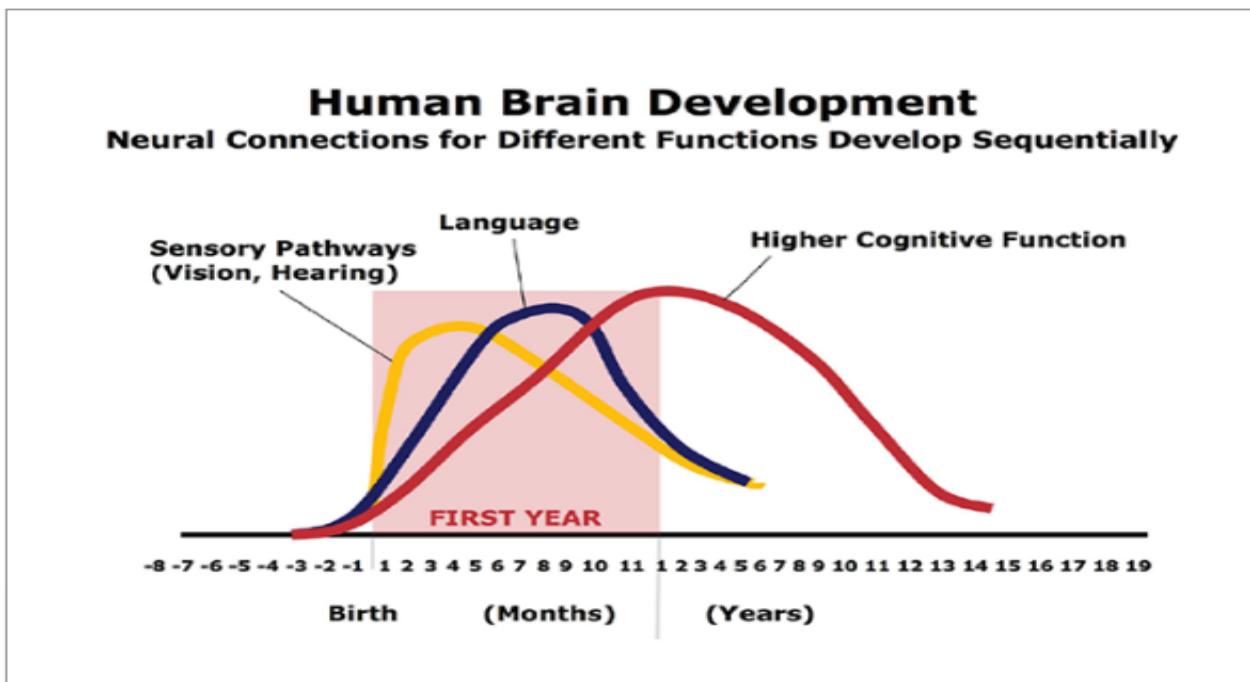
Figure 2: Education Performance and Attendance of Pre-school



Source: Nigeria Education Survey (2015)

A more fundamental concern is the lifelong impact of neglecting ECE. Broad consensus emerging from neuroscience and behavioral research is that the most critical cognitive and non-cognitive skills are developed in the first few years. For example, Figure 3 shows that children develop vision, hearing and language skills in their first year. Higher cognitive function also peaks in first year, but the overall development process continues until age 14. Similarly, a child's emotional and physical health and social skills are developed in early years of life and these skills contribute significantly to both success in school and community in the later years. Parents' role is elemental in this process, however there might be a point that professional care giver skills will be more essential. The literature on ECE mostly recommends gradual transition from home to school or start of formal ECE between age 2 and 3. This means vibrant and quality ECE is a core and prerequisite component of the education system for any country.

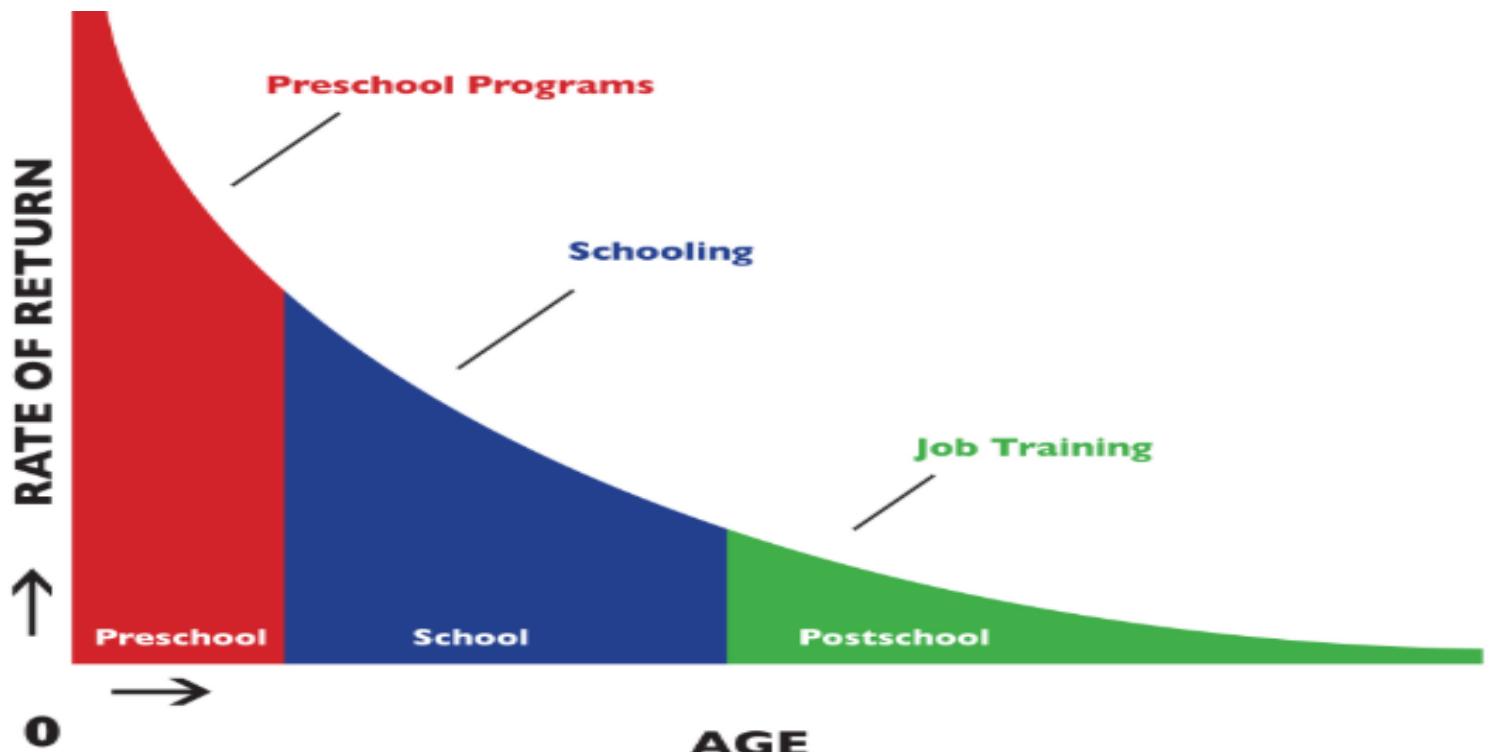
Figure 2: Education Performance and Attendance of Pre-school



Source: C.A. Nelson (2000)

Economist James Heckman has examined the rate of return on investment in all levels of education from pre-school to tertiary level and post-school training (on the job training). Interestingly, return to preschool is the highest, followed by primary, secondary and tertiary education. This evidence is the basis of the Heckman curve (Figure 4) which illustrates the declining return to each addition level of education after preschool. By one estimate, a dollar investment on ECE yields 7 dollars in return to society in terms of more productive and healthier workforce and better community and family support (Heckman, Moon and Pinto, 2010[1]).

Figure 3: Heckman curve



Source: James Heckman

From the foregoing, ECE is arguably the most important level of education. It is therefore crucial that its relevance is recognized through sound policy and institutional frameworks and funding to ensure that Nigeria achieves its ambitious educational goals and broader economic development.

- With the historic private provision of Early Childhood Education (ECE) and its relatively recent adoption in public schools in some states in Nigeria, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) developed a National Curriculum for ECE for both public and private schools to achieve the stated objectives of ECE as contained in the National Policy on Education (2013). Given the highlighted importance of ECE, it is important to assess the adequacy of underlying inputs required to deliver the objectives of ECE. Specifically, the quality of teachers, adequacy of teaching and learning facilities, and the overall coverage of the ECE curriculum. This is what Okewole, Abuovbo, & Abosede (2015) investigated in their evaluation of the implementation of ECE curriculum in Osun state. The authors surveyed a random sample of 5 schools drawn from 5 randomly selected local government areas in Osun state to draw inferences on the state and adequacy of ECE inputs in the state. The analyses revealed that there are severe inadequacies in the resource inputs at the ECE centres. Particularly, majority of the teachers at the ECE centres do not have the minimum qualifications to teach the curriculum content. Similarly, the authors found the provision of teaching and learning facilities such as classrooms, playground, and resting/sleeping facilities to be inadequate in the sampled schools. The National Curriculum for ECE tends not to be prioritized by ECE centres as only one of the sampled schools used this for instruction. Some of the reasons highlighted in the paper bordered on resource constraints and divergence between parental demand for ECE services and the provisions in the National Policy on Education (2013), which prescribes a play-based approach to ECE and the use of mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment for instruction. The current funding model for ECE in Nigeria that places most of the investment burden on households will continue to allow private ECE providers to tailor their services to the preferences of parents, relative to the National Curriculum. This is because there is no standardized assessment based on the curriculum to incentivize its adoption. The high compliance to National Curricula, by private schools, observed at primary and secondary education levels is mostly due to the curriculum-based standardized tests that is required for progression to higher levels of education. Two key policy insights follow from the foregoing: (i) there is need for greater engagement between government, parents, and other stakeholders in the policy and curriculum review processes, and (ii) more public investment is needed in ECE to improve the universal uptake of standards and ensure quality of provision among private ECE centres.
- Despite the negative parental attitude to instruction in mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment, extant evidence shows that in the early childhood classroom, using a mother tongue is effective in fostering children's learning abilities. Awopetu (2016) used a quasi-experimental design to investigate the impact of a mother tongue, the Yoruba language, on the learning abilities of pre-school children in Ondo state, Nigeria. 4 to 6 year olds in two schools were involved in the experiment that spanned one academic term (12 week). Treatment involved teaching pupils mostly in Yoruba for this period, while pupils in the control group received instruction mostly in English. Pre- and post-experiment assessments tools, validated by specialists in Early Childhood, Educational Psychology and Tests & Measurements, were administered to the participating pupils. The findings showed a significant difference in the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups. Specifically, those taught in the mother tongue performed better on the test on average relative to the control group. The use of mother tongue for ECE instruction seems like a promising prospect for raising the learning level of children. Yet, parents remain reluctant to expose their kids to schooling in languages other than English. The evidence on language of instruction remains weak in Nigeria due to study limitations relating to scope and rigor. However, the potential implication of such a policy on the learning outcomes of children warrants robust empirical investigation to inform both policy and advocacy efforts to motivate demand for instruction in mother tongue at the early grades, if confirmed to be transformative for learning in the context.